

Deeper in Christ, Further into the World.

# fpc NEWS

December 2016 Volume 50-12

## Advent Thoughts

By Gerrit S. Dawson,  
Senior Pastor

We become like that which we love. Watch two people who have recently fallen in love and you'll see that it's true. Suddenly she starts watching football; he starts eating salads. They start using the same phrases and might even buy matching sweaters. At a more profound level, we sync up with the people that matter to us the most. We develop a shared history; we have compatible goals; we know how to be together. We become like that which we love. God became man in Jesus Christ. Sit with that a moment. We become like that which we love: God became one of us. How great a love is this? How ardent must be his desire? How dizzy in love must he be? God took up skin and bone. He spoke through vocal cords. He walked under the force of gravity. He got thirsty in the heat and tired from a day of work. He laughed at dogs and gathered children in his arms. He took what we are and made it his own. Forever. When we gaze into the straw of the manger this year, we can hold close this miracle.



We become like that which we love. God so loved that he became like us.

Great Christmas traditions continue at First. This Friday night, the Live Nativity will unfold in our terraced garden at 6 and 7 pm. Encore presentations will follow December 18. On Sunday, December 11, the combined worship team and chancel choir will present *On This Shining Night* at both Sanctuary services. That afternoon, the annual downtown Pilgrimage will flow through the streets of Baton Rouge, stopping here about 6.30. And, as ever, we will keep Christmas Eve together with candlelight communion services at 4 and 6 pm. My message is entitled, "In the Fullness of Time." I hope you'll plan to join us as we come to adore this God who loves us enough to take up our humanity forever in Jesus.

## I'll Think About That After Christmas

Ever say that phrase? Everything normal seems to stop between now and the New

Year. It's hard to make plans for January. But I'd like to impress two crucial dates onto your Yule scattered minds!

1) "Can We Trust our Bibles?" is the theme for our "Stay-treat" January 20-21. Dr. Michael Kruger, president and New Testament professor at Reformed Seminary in Charlotte, will give three presentations on the reliability of Scripture. Dr. Kruger will address common doubts we have about the truth of the Word as well as frequent criticisms of Scripture found in popular media. (We're sandwiching Dr. Kruger in between a festive dinner, an ice-cream social, kids' events and Saturday snacks!)

2) Prayer Service for Racial Reconciliation, featuring Dr. Tony Evans. Thursday night, January 26 at the River Center. This joint effort by multiple Baton Rouge churches seeks the healing of our divided community and the launching of new initiatives in our city for crossing racial lines.

*Gerrit*

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DECEMBER CALENDAR

Live Nativity/Festival of Lights	Dec 2
Open Air Ministry	Dec 4
rEcess	Dec 9
WiM Christmas Celebration	Dec 10
Christmas Cantata	Dec 11
Christmas Pilgrimage	Dec 11
Live Nativity	Dec 18
Christmas Eve Worship - 4 & 6 pm	Dec 24
Christmas Worship - 10.30 am	Dec 25

UPCOMING DATES

New Year's Worship - 10.30 am	Jan 1
Perspectives Begins	Jan 9
Stay-Treat	Jan 20-21

IN MEMORIAM:

October 29, 2016  
Betty Barton, mother of Paula Willis

November 16, 2016  
Janet DeSimone  
Mother of Dennis DeSimone

BAPTISMS:

November 13, 2016  
Andrew Emory Castle  
Parents are Kate and Ryan Castle

Kate Grace Guidry  
Parents are Lauren and Collin Guidry

BIRTHS:

November 8, 2016  
Bliss Rose Aderhold  
Great-grandmother is Nancy Fogleman

SANCTUARY FLOWERS:

The Sanctuary flowers serve to honor a departed loved one or celebrate with thanksgiving cherished people or events. If you would like to donate flowers for a particular Sunday in 2017, please contact Kathy Mullins at 291.3095.

Being Detained Doesn't Dampen Spirits of Kaluga Mission Team

by David Kozan

In September, Whitney Alexander, my daughter Katherine, and I traveled to Kaluga, Russia to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Word of Life Church. For over a dozen years, First Presbyterian has had a relationship with Word of Life church. We've shared fellowship, sent groups to visit the Kaluga church, and had their senior pastor, Albert Ratkin, speak at First Presbyterian conferences. So it was fitting that they would invite a group from First Presbyterian to celebrate with them.

In the last two and a half decades, the church has faced low-level harassment and legal assaults on their property rights, just because they are openly Protestant Christians. In the last year, however, changes at the national level have made their situation, and the situation of Protestant Christians throughout Russia, more tenuous.

On July 11 this year, while the team was working on visas, Vladimir Putin signed into law a bill prohibiting any evangelism except in a church building—be it online, at home or on the street.

church: one church sent people to help serve tea at breaks, another sent a team to cook for the whole Kaluga congregation on Sunday, a number sent members bearing gifts, and several sent leaders to bring greetings.

The new laws didn't dampen the joy of the event. Part of the celebration was a commemoration of the life and martyrdom by Stalin of the founder of Russian Protestantism in Kaluga. Even this potentially somber story filled the church with a spirit of courage.

On Friday night Whitney spoke, bringing greetings and encouraging the church. Saturday night he spoke again along with arch-bishop Sergei Ryakhovsky who came from Moscow for the event. After dinner at the church the arch-bishop left for Moscow and a few minutes later we, along with Pastor Ratkin and his family, walked out of the gates of the church-yard headed for the pastor's van.

Suddenly a uniformed police officer and five plain clothes officers (who turned out to be FSB, the current day equivalent of the KGB) approached us. "Let me see your documents," said the uniformed officer to Whitney and me. (Thankfully, the pastor's wife Elena put her arm around my daughter Katherine, spoke to her in Russian, and guided her to the van and out of the situation).

We were told we had to go to the police station. Albert, his wife and a number of church members (and visiting pastors) accompanied us and waited all night. At the police station,

Whitney and I were separated and questioned for hours with no opportunity to have a lawyer. Finally, at 2.30 in the morning, a police colonel brought us together and pronounced us guilty of "religious connections" and fined us 3,000 rubles each.

During the Sunday service the next day Albert explained to the church what had happened: how a police informant had secretly (and illegally) video taped Whitney speaking to the church; we had been questioned without a lawyer until late at night and found guilty on



Whitney Alexander and David Kozan, interrogated in a Russian police station after midnight. Screen shot from a Russian television documentary showing police video of the incident.

This was a dramatic roll-back of religious freedom in Russia. Many Russian Christians were concerned. Arch-bishop Sergei Ryakhovsky, head of the Russian Evangelical Union, (of which the Kaluga church is a part) wrote in an open letter to Putin that the law "creates the basis for mass persecution of believers."

We went ahead with our plans, and on arriving in Russia for the celebration found the 300-member Kaluga church full of joy and surrounded by well-wishers from other nearby churches. I was struck by how much love the other churches poured out on the Kaluga

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## Advent Happenings at First



### Friday, December 2 & Sunday, December 18, 2016

Baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the three wise men and the shepherds along with a camel, donkey and sheep will re-enact Jesus' birth. Join us in the terraced garden. **December 2 Cast Members:** Paul Algu, Mike Avant, John Michael Cuccio, Macy Dunn, Tom Ferriss, Katie Henry, Morgan Henry, Lauren Honea, Blythe Kelly-Atol, Peter Lazar, Susannah and Matt Magnuson, Tommy Mahaffie, Elizabeth Shaw, Jacob Struppeck, Josh Struppeck, Rebekkah Struppeck, Caroline Travers and Joe Willis.

**December 18 Cast Members:** Whitney Alexander, Megan and Trey Birch, Angie Bush, Alaina Carson, The Children's Choirs, John Michael Cuccio, Alex Daniel, Tom Ferriss, Hannah Hutchinson, Eryn Leblanc, Cheryl Lott, Josh Maddin, Tommie Mahaffie, Virginia McCollum, Barry Phillips, Emily Rodriguez, Amanda Solomon, Ashley Solomon, Jim Solomon and Thomas Zak.



### Saturday, December 10, 2016

Women in Ministry invites you to its annual Christmas brunch at the home of Jane Kirkpatrick (262 S. Lakeshore Drive) on Saturday, December 10 at 10 am. We will enjoy good food, fellowship and a brief program. Please register online at [fpibr.org](http://fpibr.org). \$10 per person. Invite a friend. Childcare is not provided. Limited parking in front. Additional parking around back.



### Sunday, December 11, 2016 at 9 and 11 am Worship

On December 11, at both the 9 and 11 am Sanctuary services, the Worship Team and Chancel Choir will present "On This Shining Night" by composer Lee Dengler. It is scored for choir, soloists, narrators and orchestra. Opening the musical, the familiar carol "O Holy Night" sets the scene of majesty and wonder as the babe, Jesus, is born. This lovely work includes

the traditional carols "Joy to the World," "O Come, All Ye Faithful," "Rise Up, Shepherd and Follow" and many more.



### Sunday, December 11, 2016

This has been a year of bringing people together through many trials, and the Carol Pilgrimage will reflect that as well. Each year the downtown churches perform a 15 minute program, beginning at Mt. Zion Baptist, then proceeding to First Methodist, First Presbyterian, St. Joseph's Cathedral, St. James Episcopal, and at the final destination at First Baptist

Church, we all come together to sing Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus," followed by a light reception. On a beautiful night, the whole family can walk the entire pilgrimage.

The Abounding Love Praise Team, who worshipped with us for weeks after the flood, along with worship leader Kevin Smith, from River Community Church, will be joining the worship team and chancel choir. First Presbyterian Church will sing at 6.30 pm, following Mt Zion and First Methodist Church choirs. Please join us as we celebrate the coming together of churches to worship Jesus the Savior Born to us this Christmas season. Any questions, please contact Nancy Spiller at 387.0617 or [nancy@fpibr.org](mailto:nancy@fpibr.org).



### December 24, 2016 Christmas Eve Worship

Celebrate our Savior's birth at one of our two Sanctuary services at 4 or 6 pm.

### Sunday, December 25, 2016 Christmas Day Worship

One combined 10.30 am worship.

### Sunday, January 1, 2017 New Year's Day Worship

One combined 10.30 am worship.

## SUNDAY WORSHIP @ FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

### COME WORSHIP WITH US!

7.45 am Chapel Communion  
9 am Contemporary  
11 am Classic Reformed

### DECEMBER SERMON PASSAGES

Texts and titles are subject to change.

December 4, 2016

Luke 2: 8-15

"Lightening In a Cradle"

December 11, 2016

Luke 2: 15-20

"Treasuring All These Things"

December 18, 2016

Luke 2: 21

"The Eighth Day"

December 24, 2016

John 17: 20-26

"Not For These Only"

December 25, 2016

Luke 2: 22-35

"My Eyes Have Seen"

## PASTORAL STAFF

Gerrit S. Dawson

Senior Pastor

**M. Whitney Alexander**

Associate Pastor of Missions

Josh Maddin

Assistant Pastor of Student Ministry

**Derek McCollum**

Associate Pastor for Discipleship

and Young Adults

Barry Phillips

Ministry Executive

**Jim Solomon**

Associate Pastor for Pastoral Care

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## Together We Are Greater Than Poverty

The shepherds found baby Jesus lying in a manger, surrounded by God's animals.

What better way to celebrate the birth of Christ than to fund the purchase of animals so that impoverished families can prosper?

The Children's and Youth Ministries will be collecting money this Christmas season to donate to World Vision's Nativity Ministry. Collection jars are in the Youth and Children's halls.

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## Christmas Bags for Malachi Dads

Items are being collected for Christmas bags to be distributed to the Malachi Dads (prisoners) at Angola Penitentiary. Please consider making a donation and dropping it off at the Connection Center: soap, deodorant/anti-perspirant, toothpaste/toothbrush, shampoo/conditioner, lotion, body wash, socks or baby powder. Cash donations also accepted.

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the spot. Albert pointed out how appropriate it was that they had just learned how the Russian Protestant tradition in Kaluga was started in persecution and to take heart, because God is in charge.

After that serious note, the service turned joyful, with greetings and gifts from other churches then baptisms, and then cake, tea and food and more food and wonderful fellowship between the members of the Kaluga church and other churches who had come to share their joy.

The next day, as Albert drove us to Moscow to leave Russia, I told him I was concerned that our case might cause problems. "This

is bigger than you or me," was his wise reply.

And he was right. The US embassy in Moscow has become involved, Russian media has picked up the story (both for and against), and a local television station has made it part of a documentary lambasting Protestant Christianity. And still it is bigger than all that. It's part of the unfolding of the gospel story.

The Word promises: "Indeed, all who desire to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." We don't think about it much in the US, but I for one, have decided maybe I should.